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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/UBI, PRM AND CA  
DHS FOR OIA - CARCOS AND DSEQUEIRA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DUTCH IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION MINISTER  
PROPOSES A VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES

SENSITIVE

1. (SBU) Summary. Dutch Minister for Immigration and Integration Rita Verdonk reiterated to Charge her strong interest in visiting the U.S. Verdonk said she was interested in a program that covered both the immigration and integration sides of her portfolio. She suggested a January 2006 timeframe. End Summary.

2. (SBU) During Charge's October 25 courtesy call, Minister Verdonk stressed her strong interest in making a three-four day visit to the United States, including Washington, New York and possibly another city with a large immigrant population. She expressed interest in meetings at the Departments of Homeland Security and State and in attending public events related to U.S. immigration and naturalization policy and the integration of refugees and immigrants. In particular, she noted her strong interest in visiting the CBP National Targeting Center in conjunction with discussions on risk profiles for immigrants, and observing a naturalization ceremony.

3. (SBU) Charge noted that DHS had advised that it was still working to resolve several technical issues related to implementation of the International Expedited Traveller pilot program between Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport and New York's JFK. DHS would prefer to hold off signing the MOU establishing the program until a firm date for launching the program could be determined. Gert Versluis, Deputy Director for Immigration and Naturalization (IND), who sat in on the meeting, noted IND was keen to launch the IET program by April. He understood the U.S. side expected to be ready to begin the program by then.

4. (SBU) Charge also raised the Embassy's efforts to reach out to the Muslim population in the Netherlands. He explained that the Embassy launched this effort in part in response to polls that indicated that Dutch Muslims have a more negative impression of the United States than do Muslims in other European countries. He said the outreach program was as an attempt to better understand the concerns of the Muslim population and to better explain the United States. We were discussing with several businesses the possibility of launching a program to offer internships to Muslim students, as an example.

5. (SBU) Verdonk noted that her ministry had also launched diversity programs to encourage businesses to provide internships and other employment opportunities to minorities. Her policy advisor on integration and religious matters noted that they were looking at ways in which the ministry could cooperate with the Mission on outreach.

COMMENT

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6. (SBU) We strongly encourage DHS and Department to respond favorably to Minister Verdonk's proposal to visit the United States. She is at the center of the whole Muslim integration question in the Netherlands and carries considerable weight. Her tough policies have helped make Verdonk the most popular member of the Dutch cabinet, though many Muslims view her with distrust. The Dutch government, including Verdonk, has been a strong partner in our counter-terrorism and homeland security efforts. Her visiting the States would further strengthen that relationship.

Blakeman